In the name of Allah Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

Prayer is Islam's cure for heedlessness and its cure for excessive worldly desires is to spend in Allah's cause. Fasting controls physical desires and requirements and Hajj-the Pilgrimage, is the comprehensive and collective cure for all these spiritual ailments. It embraces the essence of all the modes of worship; tawaaf-circumambulation of the Kaaba is actually prayer itself, a fair amount of money needs to be spent for the journey and as in fasting, one has to impose certain restrictions on oneself in the state of ihram. Leaving behind the comforts of home is in any case, Hijrah-migration and Hajj in its entirety is a practical exercise in jihaad, the struggle against Satan and the self. Hajj is obligatory for every person who has the means to perform it and the physical fitness for the journey, irrespective of his family or business responsibilities. Allah tells us in the Quran:

"The first House (of worship) appointed for men was that at Makkah full of blessing and of guidance for all kinds of beings. In it are signs manifest; (for example) the Station of Abraham; whoever enters it attains security; pilgrimage thereto is a duty men owe to Allah, those who can afford the journey; but if any deny faith Allah stands not in need of any of his creatures." **(3:96-97)**

There can be nothing more destructive for a person than Allah declaring Himself free of any connection to him. Those people who, despite the necessary means, put off the performance of Hajj, year after year, on some pretext or other should worry about the state of their Eemaan.

Hajj and Our Attitude

Hajj requires sacrifice of time, wealth, comfort, worldly relationships and many other personal desires of the self. It is not undertaken for any personal ends, but solely for Allah and the fulfillment of the duty prescribed by Him. Throughout the journey, the feelings aroused due to taqwa-Allah consciousness, continuous dhikr- remembrance of Him, and ardently focusing on Allah's obedience leaves a lasting impression on a person's heart and mind. The pilgrim witnesses at every step the imprints left by those who sacrificed everything of theirs in submission and obedience to Allah and suffered all kinds of injustices, hardships and torture for this. The lesson in courage and determination that one draws from these inspiring examples can hardly be learnt from any other source, but ...

The present day born Muslim is like a child born in a diamond mine. He may have diamonds all around him, but if he plays with them as if they were stones, these diamonds become as valueless for him as stones. Our attitude towards Islam is exactly the same. Without exerting ourselves and simply by virtue of our good fortune in having been born in Muslim households, we have been given all the treasures which the world is not only searching for, but is suffering because of being deprived of them. The Kalimah Tauheed -the creed of the Oneness of Allah which shows us the right way to lead our lives and solves all difficult problems has been heard by us since childhood. We have inherited as our birthright the priceless prescriptions of prayer and fasting that are to be found nowhere else and which make human beings into responsible people and generate brotherhood, sympathy and friendship. Then there is no way more effective and powerful than Hajj, the universal movement which invites Adam's progeny from every corner of the world and draws them together in one place in the name of one God. Differences of nationality, country and race are erased and a universal community of God-worshippers is constituted. Even this magnificent practice which has been part of our heritage for generations has been inherited by us without any effort on our part and so we have not truly appreciated the value of this blessing. Now we are playing with the blessings we have been endowed with in exactly the same manner as the child born in a diamond mine that plays with diamonds and thinks that they are mere pebbles.

Prayer, fasting, almsgiving and pilgrimage are for training people who have intelligence and insight. What kind of outcome can one expect from people who neither understand the concept or the inner significance of these modes of worship, nor do they have any concern or determination to benefit from them? How can we expect good results from their performance by simply imitating the actions of others who perform the outward motions of these modes of worship

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The Spirit & Demands of Hajj & Umrah

In the Light of Quran & Sunnah

devoid of comprehension or spiritual content? Unfortunately many Muslims these days perform the outward actions associated with these modes of worship, but are unable to grasp the underlying meaning and spirit behind them. Hundreds of thousands of people go for Hajj every year but many do not experience the feelings that a person privileged enough to embark on such a spiritual journey should feel; nor does it appear, on their return, that their spirit had been moved by the experience or that it has had an impact on their actions.

The Things to be Done

We should try to not only understand the outward postures, but also the purpose and spirit behind the performance of the different activities during Hajj. As one can read about the way to perform Hajj and Umrah and about matters related to their performance from any authentic book, here we will try to explain the apparent and subtle wisdom of the different rites and rituals of Hajj and how to perform them better. For this, it is important to understand some basic facts.

The Purpose of Life

Allah created Paradise which is not a transient but a permanent place with its eternal pleasures. He then brought forth a creation, who from using the free will bestowed upon them, will choose to make themselves worthy of Paradise. From the day Adam was created, Iblis - Satan has declared war against humankind and till Doomsday, Allah's devotees will be battling against this perpetual arch-enemy.

This is in effect the trial of this world and on the success or failure in this world's test rests our permanent future. We have to race to do good deeds and save ourselves from evil, knowing fully well that Iblis and his troops have stationed themselves along the straight path of obedience to Allah that will take us to Paradise. Having resolved to lead us astray, they are lying in wait for us, ready to ambush us at every opportunity.

The Bargain Between Allah and Humans

Islam is a pact with Allah in which we have sold our lives and property to Him in exchange for the Paradise which Allah has prepared for us.

"Allah has purchased of the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the garden (of Paradise)" **(Quran 9:111)**

Now that we have forfeited our right to our lives and possessions, we must be ready to dedicate them for His cause wherever and whenever Allah requires them from us. This is the ultimate worship and there is nothing more superior to it. Having clearly understood that our lives and wealth are actually entrusted to us by Allah, if He commands us to spend for a particular cause, we should be willing and ready to do so. If we are required by Allah to fight injustice and oppression, we should be ready to do jihaad and only by doing so will we have fulfilled our pledge to Allah.

The True Purpose of the Modes of Worship

All the modes of worship are actually reminders of our duties and mould our lives and prepare us so that we may live in surrender to Allah. Bowing and prostration in prayer remind us to bend down in humility and submissiveness to the Lord who created us. Fasting reminds us that we have to live our lives according to Allah's commands and Zakah-almsgiving reminds us that our wealth belongs to Allah. Having dedicated our life and property to Allah, we need to be reminded of our pact with Him. Hajj, a progressive journey of purification of the self, is the act of delivering our lives, persons and property to Allah and symbolically waging war against Satan, our Lord's greatest enemy and renewing our pledge with Allah. Whilst in Umrah this is done briefly, in Hajj it is done in a detailed manner.

Ibrahim (AS) and the Construction of the Kaa'ba

Ibrahim (AS) underwent innumerable tribulations and calamities which tested his courage and determination. Although he was turned out of his home, abandoned by his community and thrown into the fire by the king of his land, he did not falter in his resolve and stood like a rock in the cause of truth. After leaving his country, his whole life was spent in travelling, be it Syria, Egypt, Jordan or Hijaz, solely for the purpose of bringing people to the worship of the One God and to establish Islamic centres in different locations for propagating the Oneness of Allah. He thus became a pioneer of the universal Islamic movement. On feeling

the effects of old age and being childless so far, he became anxious at the thought that there would be no one to continue his mission after him. On supplicating to Allah for pious offspring, Allah blessed him miraculously in old age, with a son Ismail upon whom Allah himself bestowed the title of *'Haleem'* - forbearing. It is not difficult to understand how emotionally attached the father must have become to this son as he became older and supported his father in his mission and thus became the focus of all Ibrahim's hopes and aspirations. An aging father, delighted to see his son grow into the man he wanted him to be, was subjected to yet a last trial which put his love, emotions and desires to the test. He was instructed in a dream to sacrifice his son for the sake of his Lord. Both father and son bowed down immediately in submission to Allah's commands. It was at the very last moment, when Ismail's neck was under the knife, that Allah substituted a ram in place of Ismail and the tradition of sacrificing animals was established after this incident. This is a supreme and unparalleled example of delivering to Allah what belongs to Him. The father resolved to sacrifice what was his only child at that time, and who was dearer and more precious to him than anything in the world including his own life. Thus, both father and son clearly displayed their obedience and exemplary submission to Allah's commands. Ibrahim became worthy of the title of *'Khalilullah'* - *'Allah's friend'*, bestowed upon him by Allah and was also established in the role of *'Imaam un Naas'* - leader of the whole world. Under instructions from Allah, both raised the walls of the first and greatest centre of Tauheed i.e. Baitullah - Allah's House. After its construction, they received the command: *"And proclaim the Pilgrimage among men."* **(22;27)** This is the call which was given centuries ago and in response to that we say: *"Labbayk, Labbayk"- "Here I am before you, Here I am before you,"* affirming our intention and resolve to travel to the Sacred Mosque which was constructed by Ibrahim (AS).

The Rites of Hajj

The rites of Hajj have been referred to in the Quran as symbols of Allah. Every action performed in Hajj is symbolic and serves the purpose of making us feel the different aspects of submission to Allah.

Ihraam - the Pilgrim's Attire: Ihram symbolizes the detachment of the pilgrim from the pleasures, occupations and distractions of the world. Whatever one's position in the world, in two unstitched sheets of cloth, one comes humbly as a beggar and destitute before Allah.

Talbiyyah: *'Labbayk'* is the response to the call of Ibrahim (AS). This call has reached very corner of the world and the devotees of Allah, in acknowledgment of his blessings and affirming their belief in His Oneness, give this touching response: *"Here I am before you."*

Hajr e Aswad: When one kisses or touches the Black Stone it amounts to accepting that one is putting one's hand in Allah's hand according to the time-old tradition of sealing pacts and treaties by kissing the hand. We renew our pledge of obedience and loyalty to Allah and reaffirm that by accepting Islam we have delivered our lives and wealth to Him.

Tawaaf: They are circumambulations related to the undertaking of vows. It was the ancient custom in the religion of Ibrahim that if the sacrifice was being offered at an altar or that if something or person was being dedicated to the service of a place of worship it was made to circumambulate it. Thus, Tawaaf i.e. going round and round the focus of our faith and the hub of our lives symbolizes that we are dedicating ourselves to the service of Allah.

Saee: Marwa is Ismail's place of sacrifice. The Prophet (SAW) said: *"This place of sacrifice" meaning Marwa, "and all the pathways of Makka and its roads are a place of sacrifice."* **(Muwatta)**

It was later that the place of sacrifice was extended till Mina for the convenience of the ummah. When Ibrahim (AS) set off to sacrifice Ismail (AS), he stood on the Safa hillock and saw this place of sacrifice, and then to fulfill Allah's command he walked towards Marwa, increasing his pace. The Quran refers to saee as *"Yattawwafa "- 'compassing them'* **(2:158)**. So saee is the tawaaf - the going round of the place of sacrifice. According to some narrations it is the reenactment of Ismail's mother Hajrah's running between Safa and Marwa in search of water.

Rami: Rami is symbolic of cursing Iblis and waging war against the enemies of Allah and amounts to the pilgrims' declaration of war against their Lord's enemies.

Sacrificing an Animal: The sacrifice symbolises the offering of one's life to Allah and demonstrates the intention and resolve of the pilgrim to give his life in the way of Allah whenever so required. The sentiment for the sacrifice has been brought to our attention in the Quran like this: *"It is not their meat, nor their blood that reaches Allah: it is your piety that reaches Him."* **(22:37)**

Shaving the Head: In the olden days, if a person became someone's slave, his head was shaved. Related to hajj, shaving the head signifies our total submission to Allah and is a symbol of our obedience and giving ourselves into His bondage forever.

Rituals of Hajj

The war between human beings with Iblis is performed in a symbolic manner during Hajj. At Allah's call, a person leaves everything - his home, his family and business and at Allah's command, saying *'labbayk'*, he sets off to perform the pilgrimage. In a symbolic manner he is saying that on whatever front his Lord calls him to do battle with His enemies, he will respond immediately and will be prepared to sacrifice his life and property for the purpose. The readiness to do Jihaad-struggle in the cause of Allah is the ultimate in subservience and is so much a part of every action performed during Hajj, that the whole Hajj appears to be a practical exercise in Jihaad. This is why the Prophet (SAW) when asked whether jihad was incumbent on women, said: *"Yes, jihad which does not include fighting is incumbent on them. It is the hajj and the umrah."* **(Ibn e Majah)**

On wearing the ihraam on 8 Dhul-Hijjah, it is as if the devotes of Allah abandon all the pleasures, comforts and occupations of this world and saying *'Labbayk, Labbayk'* march like soldiers into the battlefield and camp in the valley of Mina, 5km from Makkah. It is as if an army has camped there bringing all its provisions with it.

The next day, all the mujaahids-soldiers in the cause of Allah are commanded to move to the next front and so they all assemble in the open plain of Arafah. Arafah is in fact a substitute for the Kaaba for that day as it is not possible to make the Kaaba the assembly place for so many people. So all the mujahideen- forces fighting in the battle against Satan assemble at Arafah, plead for forgiveness for their sins and beg Allah to make them victorious in this battle. At Dhuhr time, they hear the Khutbah-the sermon of their Imaam-commander and Qasr - the shortened prayer is performed combining both Dhuhr and Asr prayers, as is done in the battlefield. Following the sermon, people are engaged till Asr time, with hands outstretched in constant supplication to Allah.

Muzdalifah is the equivalent of the camping ground on the way back. After performing both Maghrib and Isha prayers combined together, the pilgrims sleep peacefully all night. (This was the only night in the Prophet's life that he did not offer tahajjud - the late night prayer). After performing the Fajr prayer the next morning, the pilgrims once again plead and supplicate to Allah before returning to their camp at Mina. It is as if the mujahideen, after their rest are returning once again to the battlefield. When they reach Mina they symbolically throw stones at Satan, sacrifice their animals and as an act of total submission to Allah they shave their heads. To perform circumambulation, symbolic of their vows of obedience to Allah, they then proceed to the Kaaba, their real place of worship and Marwa the place of sacrifice, just as a soldier, having performed his duty, returns triumphantly to his headquarters. After performing tawaaf and two cycles of prayer, the ihram is removed. The pilgrims then return from Makkah to Mina and for the next two or three days they continue to camp in Mina, engaged in remembrance of Allah and continuing the practice of throwing stones at the Jamarat- the pillars signifying the defeat and destruction of the enemies of Allah. After finally throwing stones at these pillars on the third day, the pilgrims return to Makkah and perform the tawaaf-e-wida (for taking leave) and completing it means the completion of Hajj.

Kaaba is the Heart of the Islamic Nation

The similitude of the Kaaba for the Islamic nation is like a heart in a man's body. In exactly the same way that the heart draws blood from its far-off veins and

cleanses it and re-circulates the blood, this 'heart of the Islamic world' draws Muslims from various parts of the world, and cleansed of their sins, they return re-energised to serve Allah.

Madinah Munawwarah

- There is no better activity than Darood and Salaam-sending blessings and salutations of peace upon the Prophet (SAW) when journeying to Madinah and during the stay there.
- The Prophet (SAW) has also referred to this beloved city of his as 'Haram'- sacred. Hence we are required to observe its sanctity and refrain from prohibited acts while we are there.

Before Embarking on the Journey

- Funds spent on the pilgrimage should have been earned through halaal-lawful means. The Prophet (SAW) made mention of a person who travels widely, his hair disheveled, and covered with dust. *"He lifts his hands and makes supplication, 'O Lord, O Lord,' but his diet is unlawful, his drink is unlawful, and his clothes are unlawful, and his nourishment is unlawful. How then can his supplication be accepted?"* **(Muslim)**
- Hajj is a personal act due to which all one's minor and major sins and oversights related to duties owed to Allah are forgiven. However as regards the rights of people, repentance is meaningless unless you make amends. If you have been unjust to someone, then you should seek their forgiveness. It is against the demands of common sense, religion and etiquette that you should usurp someone's rights and at the same time expect to have Allah forgive you for this act. It is as ridiculous as forcibly taking possession of a widow's house, living in it and then continuing to pray sincerely for Allah's forgiveness. This is not acceptable. In case, it is not possible to make amends or compensate the person who has been wronged, as for example, the person has passed away and he has no heirs, then you should continue to ask Allah for forgiveness.
- At least one month before departure for Hajj, you should start studying authentic books on the subject, listen to instructional audio cassettes on Hajj and participate in the training programs organised for the purpose. Try to reflect on the rites and rituals of hajj and the significance of its each and very day. Try to understand the effect that Allah's Deen-religion wants to create in a person's heart and mind through every action performed during the course of Hajj. Then, like a conscious believer, with full awareness and care, perform every ritual of Hajj, fully conscious of its true purpose and meaning. This will enable you to make real and meaningful changes in your life.
- How wonderful it would be if you could take Arabic lessons prior to departure for Hajj so that you could understand the Quran without the help of a translation! This will enhance the joy felt in prayer. Studying some good books on the Prophet's seerah-life will also make the Hajj more meaningful for you. You should also take some good collections of Quranic and Masnoon-prescribed supplications and with full consciousness and confidence, supplicate to Allah during Tahajjud, Tawaaf and at all those the times and occasions that we have been told that supplications are answered.

And take Your Provision with You

"And take a provision (with you) for the journey but the best of provisions is right conduct." **(Quran 2:197)** This means that the real provision is fear of Allah and refraining from disobedience to His commands and leading a life of virtue and piety. For this, do bear the following in mind:

- Realise that travelling, by its very nature, is an inconvenience no matter how comfortable the journey. Be prepared for all kinds of discomfort as this is an inherent part of travel.
- Adjust your expectations from others. Remind yourself that you have no right to make demands on others and that you are the one who should be making the sacrifices rather than expecting to have your demands met.
- Remember that the whole journey is a training session and a continuing course through which a Muslim attains progressive purification of the self. So refrain totally from sins, abuse, indecency, dishonesty, squabbles and bickering because you are proceeding on the path of Allah. If somebody tries to quarrel with

you or wrongs you, do not retaliate and makes things worse. The Prophet (SAW) said: *"I guarantee a house in the surroundings of Paradise for a man who avoids quarrelling even if he were in the right."* **(Abu Dawood)**

- Imprint this hadith firmly on your mind: The Prophet (SAW) said, *"No fatigue, nor disease, nor sorrow, nor sadness, nor hurt, nor distress befalls a Muslim, even if it were the prick he receives from a thorn, but that Allah expiates some of his sins for that."* **(Bukhari)**
- Make sure you remember that the purpose of this trip is to perform Hajj and not sightseeing or shopping. Beware of the dangers in these activities as they will take away your valuable time and distract you from the main purpose of this trip.
- Is it not appropriate that in order to perform the worship for which you came so far, in the best possible manner, you should make yourself oblivious to how you are being treated? The limited time you have is not the time to pamper your ego and self, but to do the maximum amount of Allah's dhikr-remembrance, tasbeeh-glorification, dua-supplication, istighfar-seeking Allah's forgiveness, darood and salaam-blessings and salutations of peace on the Prophet (SAW), tawaaf-circumambulation, tilaawah-recitation of the Quran and try to earn as much of Allah's good pleasure and His rewards as you can.
- Beware of the danger of self pity due to the difficulties you may encounter on this trip as this will divert you from the remembrance of Allah and purification of the self. When you face any difficulties, just ask yourself if it is really as bad as it feels or is it just Satan's ploy to get you depressed. Remember that it is not the difficulty itself that creates problems, but the way that one chooses to react to it. If a person can understand this very well that difficulties and sorrows are beneficial for him, he will not let them affect him adversely.
- Supplication is a believer's weapon in all circumstances. Whenever a person becomes heedless and neglects supplication, he will feel the onslaught of Satanic forces and that he has no support or help. Do keep asking Allah for ease in all matters.

Remember that this Hajj trip is the spring season of your life which may never come again. Take from it as many blooms as you can. The rest of one's life is there for you to do other things. If you can bear all these things in mind, then In Sha Allah, with Allah's help, your path will become very easy.

A New Life

The Prophet (SAW) said: *"Whoever performs Hajj to this House (Ka'ba) and does not approach his wife for sexual relations nor commits sins (while performing Hajj), he will come out as sinless as a newly-born child. (just delivered by his mother)."* **(Bukhari)**

When you reflect on this hadith, you feel that whereas a normal Muslim has been given only one life which starts at birth and ends at death, a pilgrim has been given two lives, one which lasts from his birth to the time he performs the Hajj and the second from after the Hajj till he dies. In the same way that his first life starts with a clean slate, so does his second, as all the sins of his first life are erased from the record of his deeds. In one respect, his second life is better than the first, because he will not lose time in the heedlessness of childhood and adolescence. His second life will have started with full consciousness of the need to make the most of his life in respect of the Hereafter.

On 8 Dhul-Hijjah when you put on your ihraam it is as if you end your first life and wear the shrouds in which you would have been buried. On 10 Dhull-Hijjah when you offer the sacrifice and shave your head you begin your second life. Now the first life with all its sins and errors will become history, but…

What are Your Plans for the Future?

- As soon as you start your return trip, do some serious reflection and continue doing this again and again to see what impact Hajj has had on your life and if it has changed you. Do you feel sad at leaving those places behind which you may never see again? Or are you worried about the duty payable on the imported items that you bought on the trip and are planning how you will evade custom duty on them?
- Are you anxious about protecting your newly acquired life from sins and

making the most of it or have the worldly occupations you had left behind when embarking on this trip immersed you in them already?

- Have you decided to read the Quran regularly and are determined to make an effort to understand it first hand without the help of a translation?
- Are you trying to improve the quality of your worship modes?
- Have you become sufficiently conscious of how unimportant and short this worldly life is and are refraining from useless and futile talk and activities?
- Have you stopped demanding your rights from others and have started focusing on giving people the rights you owe to them?
- Are you making sure that your income is from halaal-permissible means?
- Have you stopped obsessing and complaining about how unfair people are to you and started noticing all the times you are unjust to them?

If you see these changes in yourself, wholly or partially, then thank Almighty Allah who not only erased your earlier sins from your record of deeds, but enabled you to perform virtuous deeds now and in the future. And if you are exactly the same as when you left for Hajj then…

O my hapless heart, it is such a shame that you journeyed to the sacred Kaaba which the Quran refers to as *"full of blessing and of guidance for all kinds of beings."* and returned with no change in your behavior and actions. Did you go there only to get your previous sins erased? Was it not your intention to acquire the resolve and determination to refrain from future sins?

LASTLY

Throughout our lives we continue to accumulate sins, confident that when we go for pilgrimage we will be able to ask forgiveness and have them erased from our account. If we are fortunate enough to be granted the opportunity by Allah to go for pilgrimage this may indeed happen, but if, perchance, death overtakes us before that, the angels will make sure that our sins accompany us to our graves so that we may suffer their consequences.

Those few of us, who are fortunate enough to be bestowed with the opportunity of performing Hajj, may indeed have our previous sins forgiven and erased, but we need to be very careful after this, as accumulating sins again does not take very long. There are also too many 'daring' people out there who go back to sinning on the return journey itself!

There are many people who appear very religious and who go for Hajj with the sole purpose of getting their sins forgiven, but they do not realize the importance of taking measures to ensure that they stay away from sins. Worse still, there are people whose only concern is that they have performed Hajj; they neither realise that they are rid of their old sins, nor are they conscious of the fact that their sins are piling up on them. Only those intelligent and wise people benefit fully from Hajj who realise how fortunate they are that their sins have been erased from their record of deeds and who become very cautious and alert, taking measures to make sure that sins do not tarnish it again.

Remember that a Muslim of average means performs Hajj only once in his lifetime and there is very little likelihood that you will be afforded this opportunity again. So do not start piling up sins again; there is a great danger that these sins will accompany you to your grave!

May Allah grant us the opportunity to perform a Hajj Mabrur (a faultless Hajj that is free of sin and is graced with Divine acceptance and pleasure) and bestow upon us the ability to grasp its true meaning and significance and live our lives accordingly. Ameen.

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PYAME DOST House # ZB-1037/C, Sector 3,
Khayaban -e- Sir Syed, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.
Website: www.pyamedost.org
E-mail: pyamedost@hotmail.com